

# Cross Culture in Missions

## What is CULTURE?

A way of living for a specific group of people: The way they look, talk, think, relate, work ...Includes values, habits, traits, priorities, symbols, world view. Keeps society ordered by its standards and way of doing things.

## The Bible is Multi - Cultural

The Bible is a cross-cultural (cc) training document. It has the only absolutes that we possess. A member of any culture can use it safely to relate both to God and to fellow humans. The principles of Scripture are intended by God to be used by persons of any culture in relation to other persons of any other culture or subculture. Otherwise, it would be good for only Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures.

## The Bible is above Culture

The Bible is above culture, since it stands to judge any culture. There are elements of "common grace" insights that even pagans enjoy.

A culture may reflect God's principles of hospitality to strangers (*Ex. 22:21; Lev. 19:10; Heb. 13:2*), for instance. It may have strong taboos against embarrassing anyone ("face" saving, *1 Cor. 13:4*), but may allow parents to invade and control the marriage of a son or daughter (*Eph. 5:31*).

Scripture stands in judgment of culture, not culture over the Bible.

Whenever culture and Scripture conflict, culture must be judged.

God is both able and willing to reveal errors in our understanding (*Phi. 3:15*). The Word of God "is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (*Heb 4:12*) However, understanding God's mind involves nonconformity to the prevailing unchristian worldview (*Rom. 12:2*). A culture will be as Christian as its people have been permeated with biblical truth.

# The Origin of Communication

We communicate because God communicates. It has been shown that within the Trinity, there was both communication and love. Jesus had glory, and the love of the Father before the creation of the world (*John 17:5, 24*). The Father communicated to the Son that Jesus was to go into our world (*John 17:18*). There was knowledge of each Person of the Trinity (*John 17:25*). The Word had fellowship with God (*John 1:1*) before coming to earth. The Spirit is also eternal (*Heb. 9:14*), and was present with the Father and Son from the creation of the world (*Gen. 1:1-2; John 1:3; Col. 1:16*). Also noted, the love and communication among the Trinity is the basis of love and communication among men and women whom He has created in His image (*Gen. 1:27*).

## Worldview

Culture may be defined as the particular solutions to the needs of life adopted by a group of people. It rests upon beliefs. The deepest beliefs and assumptions about the world, including values, perspectives, taboos and behaviors, constitute one's worldview. A worldview constitutes a cognitive grid through which perceptions are interpreted. Typically this worldview cannot be articulated by the holder, since it is taken for granted, and is so deeply ingrained from birth. A person wearing glasses, for instance, doesn't notice the lenses, yet they are unique to the needs of the wearer, and would not help most others to properly see.

One's worldview can be illuminated through contact with contrasting cultures. It can be judged as "right" or "wrong" by the absolute standard of the Bible. Otherwise, a culture can be judged to be relatively more or less efficient in dealing with its unique environment. Worldview can also be illuminated by the "deep structures" inherent in language. It is common wisdom that to understand a people, their language needs to be comprehended.

In trying to discover the worldview of an ethnic group, it has been advised that the method of triangulation be used. Possible explanations for a specific behavior, such as spending great sums for a wedding, are considered. As other "unusual" behaviors are observed, perhaps throwing an expensive party when someone prospers financially, explanations are sought which explain as many of the "unusual" behaviors as possible. That explanation, the intersection of the largest number of adequate answers to behavior, would be a key to the worldview.

## Relationship Building

The essential nature of Christian ministry is personal relationships with those we seek to serve. James Engel, a Christian expert in communication, developed a model, which places the acceptance of the messenger before the acceptance of the Gospel. A good relationship precedes the most effective evangelism, although there have been exceptions, since the Holy Spirit is not limited. A strong relationship is almost essential for discipleship.

A trust bond develops slowly, and is earned by attempting to be faithful. It may take years to develop a reputation for being trustworthy.

**Personal strength comes from God.** King David wrote, "When I felt secure, I said, 'I will never be shaken.' O Lord, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed." (*Ps 30:6-7*). Prayer gives us personal stability. Personal acceptance can be based upon the acceptance of God. "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." (*Rom. 15:7*).

From a basis of self-acceptance ("Love your neighbor as yourself." *Luke 10:27*), we can love others. "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." This love covers cross-cultural conflict. Love must operate behind any Christian ministry. Otherwise our sacrifice means nothing (*1 Cor. 13:1-3*). When God loved, He gave (*John 3:16*).

## Communicating Christ Clearly to a Secular World

Jesus lived and died at the crossroads of humanity. When He was crucified, Pilate ordered the inscription on the cross to be written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek—the languages of the three major cultural groups of that era. The forgiving fact of the Cross-reaches across cultural barriers, and so must its message.

Foreign missionaries must learn to communicate the gospel across cultural barriers. The church in America needs some of those same skills and sensitivities to reach our secular society. America has long been considered a Christian nation, but it really cannot be described as such any longer. In the last several decades, America has increasingly become a post-Christian culture. The church now faces the challenge of communicating the message of Christ in an intercultural context, as do foreign missionaries.

To effectively communicate Christ to a secular society, we must recognize that we are communicating from a church culture to a secular culture. We may be communicating to Americans, whose culture we share; but if we have spent much of our lives in the church, we have acquired the perceptions, values, and even the vocabulary of the church. So consider these:

- The Christian and the unbeliever may both speak English, but the Christian often uses church terms that are unfamiliar or mean something different in secular culture.
- When we use Christian jargon freely with unbelievers, we erect a communication barrier. Words such as "saved," "gospel," and "anointing," have commonly accepted meanings for us, but are confusing to people who are unfamiliar with those terms.

- Unbelievers must be reached through their vocabulary, not ours.

In Col 4:2-6, the apostle Paul wrote, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt so that you may know how you should respond to each person."

Paul demonstrated a dependency on divine activity in the evangelism process.

- He asked believers to pray that God would open a door for his message and also that God would help him make the message clear, to help him speak as he ought to.
- Though we depend on God to open a door for the Word, we must also depend on God to help us make the message clear and act with wisdom toward those outside the church.
- We need to be prophetic, boldly proclaiming the good news about Jesus in the Spirit's power. But we also need to speak the language of the listeners, recognizing with the apostle Paul that we must make the mystery of Christ known clearly and with wisdom toward others. (Col 4:5-6)
- The term Paul used—"outsiders"—is especially descriptive. We have all been in settings where we have been outsiders. The *insiders* have private jokes and expressions. We don't understand, so we are left out because the meanings are private.
- But we are not to be private with Christ's message. We must be public.
- When Jesus dealt with people, He always used language and concepts they could understand and to which they could relate. In New Testament times, one of the greatest cultural barriers was between Jews and Samaritans. Yet Jesus penetrated that barrier.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan came in response to a lawyer's question: "Who is my neighbor?" The real question the lawyer asked was, "Who is *not* my neighbor?" What he really wanted to know was whom he was *not* obligated to love as himself. It is obvious from the parable that the man in the ditch was a Jew. Those who passed him were also Jews, but the Samaritan acted as a neighbor to the man in need. As simple as it sounds, the Samaritan cared for the man just because he was there. That is who our neighbor is—whichever is there.

In the context of foreign missions, each new generation is an un-reached people group. The same is true in America. Our neighbors in America—the people who are there—are very different from those of preceding generations. And they must be reached.

When Jesus dealt with the Samaritan woman at the well, He used language and ideas she could understand. He dealt clearly with the issue of sin, but He did it by centering the conversation on the woman's needs and interests. Jesus guided the conversation but did not totally control it. He responded to the woman, as Paul exhorted us to do. (Col 4:6)

When a *Pentecostal Evangelist* walked the streets of Moscow with his team, they interviewed several people. He introduced the subject of God to one girl and she replied, "I believe in God, but I'm not certain He has the power to solve Russia's problems. I don't go to church because mostly older people are there, and they won't let me wear pants."

It was troubling to me that this girl's exposure to the gospel was hindered because she did not feel she could go to church just as she was. In many altar invitations the choir sings, *Just as I Am*, but we sometimes expect people to come to Christ on the church's terms.

## **How can Christian believers communicate more sensitively and effectively with people in a secular culture?**

### **Learn**

Give thought to and study Christian vocabulary and concepts that may be foreign to secular people and learn to convey Christian truth in their language. My missionary parents always befriended unbelievers and related effectively to people with no Christian background. To act with wisdom toward outsiders, we must know and understand them. To do that requires spending time with them. Jesus' first call to His disciples was simply that they might "be with him." We need to be careful not to see people only as eternal souls without valuing them as individuals. (*Mark 3:14*)

### **Listen**

Don't just preach—answer questions. Don't dominate conversations, but guide them. Remember the apostle Paul's admonition to "respond" to outsiders. The apostle Peter said that believers should "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (*1 Peter 3:15*)

### **Love**

Simply love people. "Love covers a multitude of sins," even cultural blunders. Cultural mistakes can be forgiven if the person making those mistakes demonstrates sincere love. (*1 Peter 4:8*)

Communicating Christ across cultural barriers is not an option for the Church, but a necessity—a biblical mandate. In *Col 4*, Paul twice uses the Greek word *dei*, which is a strong imperative meaning, "must" or "necessary." Paul stated that the message of Christ must be spoken clearly (*Col 4:4*) and we must respond to each outsider with wisdom. (*Col 4:5,6*)

# God has placed the Church in the world to be salt and light

to affect the world around us. Whoever is there—must be reached. The Church must not be isolated from secular society, but should penetrate it—taking part in God's sovereign work, calling people "out of darkness into His marvelous light." (*1 Peter 2:9*)

## Cross-cultural Effectiveness

There are **seven major areas** that must be focused on for any short-term ministry to be effective. Though there are other items that could be included, these seven areas are core focus points. In order to help in learning the **seven areas** we have devised the acronym: **SPLICED**.

### S - Spiritual

A short-term missions experience needs to be seen as a spiritual ministry, as well as Long-Term Missions. This is true whether you are doing a construction project or an evangelism outreach. How do you make sure that the trip will be a time of spiritual growth both for those going and for the people of the host country?

### P – Personal

Each person going on the team will be a unique individual. How do you select those people who will make the project a success? How do you help people to know their own strengths and limitations that will come out during a mission's experience? What are the signs of difficult personal issues to look for during the mission's experience that will leave a deep wound on the individual and how can you deal with these issues?

### L - Logistical

The logistical includes all the planning, passports, and packing. This is a very important part to make a short-term experience as smooth flowing as possible but it must be guarded against becoming the central point of all the focus.

### I - Interpersonal

Learning to work together as a team is one of the great experiences of a short-term missions trip. However, building a team is also one of the most difficult goals to achieve. Living in a new and different culture produces a lot of stress. How do you build team relations? How do you resolve conflict when it does arise? How do you identify and describe your style of leadership to the group? How do you keep a balance between building a team and accomplishing the task?

## **C - Culture and Language**

Learning about another culture should be one goal of every team going on a short-term missions trip. How do you learn what is of value in another culture? How do you learn to be more comfortable in strange surroundings? How can you learn to differentiate between what is really dangerous and what is just uncomfortable? How do you build a friendship with someone from another culture? How can you learn a little of the language of that culture?

## **E - Endurance/Enjoyment**

People go on short-term mission trips for a wide variety of reasons. There is generally the expectation that it will be enjoyable but sometimes it turns out to be more difficult than people expected. Helping the short term participants to express both sides of endurance and enjoyment will help others to get a truer picture of what the trip was like. We call this "talking in paradox".

## **D - Debriefing**

Team participants need time to share with each other what has happened during their team experience and prepare for coming back into their world.

These **seven areas are interrelated**. They are **SPLICED together** to form one strong whole.

# Coping with Culture Shock and Re-Entry Stress

You will not be the same after participating on a Ministry/Missions trip. The new friendships, the team's close fellowship, intense prayer and the joys of seeing people saved, healed and delivered by the power of God will change you forever. The **shock of being in a new culture** will draw new feelings from you, but coming home may be even more difficult. Even after a trip of a few short weeks, you may find yourself having some difficulty readjusting to being back in your usual routine. You may find yourself reacting to what appears to be complacency all around you and as a result experience some re-entry stress. You may start asking yourself "What now?" These feelings and questions are normal reactions to this kind of experience and will be shared by every team member to some degree.

## Culture Shock

This is something that is experienced, to some degree, by everyone who travels to a foreign country and is defined as the more pronounced reactions to the psychological disorientation most people experience when they enter into a culture different from their own.

***Those who participate in a short-term Ministry/Missions trips do not actually experience culture shock but you may still experience some discomfort.***

## Stages of Culture Shock

### Fascination or Tourist Stage

In this stage one will experience new places, new sounds, new smells and a very kind people who are willing to help the newcomer find their way around. During this stage the Ministry/Missions worker is very tolerant of the host culture and excited about being on the "mission field". (As a short-term worker you will usually only experience this stage)

### Rejection Stage

The newness of the host culture will eventually wear off and the worker begins to reject the host culture and even become critical of it. Frustration with the new culture is high during this stage.

## Recovery Stage

The new comer begins to learn some of the “rules” of the new culture, its language and ways, and starts to feel more at ease. Frustration declines and one begins to accept the host culture leaning to be a part of it.

## Bi-culturalism Stage

Full recovery occurs during this stage. The newcomer becomes functional in two cultures and some of the things from the new culture will be tremendously missed when the worker returns home.

## Causes of culture shock

These will vary from individual to individual and may affect you as a short-term worker. Some include: the ambiguity of a particular situation; unrealistic goals; not seeing results due to the enormity of the need, the poverty and hopelessness of the people and making embarrassing mistakes within the new culture.

## Cures for culture shock

The following is a list of some suggestions you might like to keep in mind that will help you to overcome any discomfort or culture shock.

- Gather as much information about the host country and culture that you can before going. It helps to ease the shock the more you know about the host country.
- Look for logical reasons behind everything, in the host culture, which seem confusing, difficult or threatening.
- Do not refer to nationals as “natives” or make derogatory jokes and comments about them. (**Nationals of South American countries consider themselves Americans as well, so when referring to a national of the United States use the term North American**)
- Pay attention to how things are done, by the nationals, and allow yourself to adapt to their ways. Do not be afraid to ask if you are not sure about something. Most people will respond positively to you as you try to understand and accept their ways. Do not assume that something you may consider acceptable at home is acceptable in the host culture. Be flexible and open to learn from them. Realize that you may do something unintentionally that will offend a national causing them to react. Look at such an occasion as an opportunity to express love toward them even at cost to yourself.
- Be sure to have God’s agenda and not your own that is culturally defined by a Western mind.
- Look for friendly bridges to incorporate Jesus.

It will help to discuss, with your team leader or other team members, any discomfort you may be experiencing. Some discomfort is part of traveling to another country. Look with anticipation to what God will teach you from being there.

## Re-Entry Stress

This is the process that you may experience upon returning home. Re-entry stress or reverse culture shock generally is experienced to a greater degree the longer one has been in another country. Disillusionment with America and American Christianity play a part in any re-entry stress that is experienced.

## Initial Reactions

If this is your first trip outside your home country you will be exposed to things you have never experienced first hand before, such as the plight and poverty of many in developing countries. It is not uncommon upon returning home to become disturbed and even bitter toward America's opulence and waste.

When you return you will be excited to eat the "Big Mac and large fries" you have been craving. Your family and friends will be proud and excited to see you and you will experience a "high". You have just conquered the unknown, been used greatly by God and you will be the center of attention. Soon, however, this "high" drops and re-entry shock may begin.

Following are a few examples of possible reactions you may experience. Be prepared to deal with life back home in light of your new experience. All short-term ministry/missions workers will experience some degree of re-entry stress.

### Self-concept

Any life-changing experience can cause you to re-evaluate who you are in light of the experience. Questions about the meaning of life and its direction may be a part of the re-entry process. You may decide never to go outside the United States again or you may discover that there is a call on your life to ministry outside the United States. Questioning life can be good, but the uncertainty of the answers may cause some stress.

### Value Change and Choice

Clashes between you and those to whom you return may occur in several different areas, such as material possessions, family life, racial prejudice, national priorities in ecology and politics, and Christian community conflicts. Some workers develop a "holier than Thou" attitude towards those who did not go. This can lead to you becoming disillusioned with Christians at home and cause you to consider them more tolerant of sin and not as committed as the Christians you met while outside the United States.

One missionary worker returning home, from the Far East, shared:

*"Everybody looks rich. We stayed with good friends in a Western state who complained about the high cost of living? Yet, they are overweight and live like royalty. Many of them were talking about inflation and how they had to cut corners...but most were*

*wasteful and kept on buying. Why is air-conditioning kept so low? We freeze everywhere we go.”*

You may face the problem of integrating what you have just seen with what you see around you at home. Your eyes may be opened to the shallowness of Western Materialism and you may want to react by telling others they are wrong to own so many “things”, eat so much food and waste so much.

## **Expectations**

You will have had many expectations for your trip about the culture and language differences, the new and exotic country and God’s purpose for you making the trip. However, you may not have expected the reactions you may encounter when you return home. You may find that you feel like a stranger now in your own country. You may have expected your family and friends to be as excited as you are about your experience and become hurt if they show little or no real interest about something that has made a tremendous impact on your life. Realize that many will just not be able to understand what you have been through. This seemingly lack of interest can reinforce in you an opinion that American Christians are just not interested in the rest of the world and are simply lovers and pleasers of self. You must guard yourself from becoming resentful toward family, friends and American Christians.

## **Sense of Loss**

You may experience a sense of loss over newfound friends and places or from being disconnected from the rest of the team. Your recent experience is not the nitty-gritty reality of everyday life. Being in a strange country, away from all familiar cues and the security of familiar faces and places can facilitate a tendency to become extremely close to fellow team members and when you return home you may experience a sense of void. It may take sometime to readjust to your life as it was before your trip. You may also feel a loss of purpose and self-importance. God has just used you greatly to minister to the needs of others in a different country and when you return this purpose may seem somewhat lessened.

# Stages of Re-Entry:

## Initial Euphoria

You are pleased to be home and everyone is glad to see you.

## Irritability and Hostility

After the initial euphoria you may become irritated and hostile towards others for any number of reasons.

## Gradual Adjustment

It may take time for you to readjust to the way your life was before your trip.

## Adaptation

You have been changed. Life went on when you were gone and it may take time for you to catch up.

# Response to Reverse Culture Shock

To minimize the effects of re-entry stress find methods of "closure". One example is to stay in touch with other team members after returning home. Be sure you should share things about the present with them and not just the memories of your trip. See your experience realistically and allow God to show you how to use this use it. Have a right perspective of God's total plan.

## Things to Consider:

- Be aware that you may experience some depression, loneliness, fatigue and illness as re-entry symptoms of stress. You can be stressed by either happy or sad events. You may go through a grief process.
- Be alert to your own expectations and the expectations of others. Value conflicts may occur.
- Allow for rest, reflection and rejoicing in what you have seen God do. Go over your experiences and ask the Lord to show you the various aspects of your trip and grow from them. Evaluate what you have been through.
- Take your time to readjust. Be patient with others who do not understand what you have experienced.

# Coping with Culture Shock

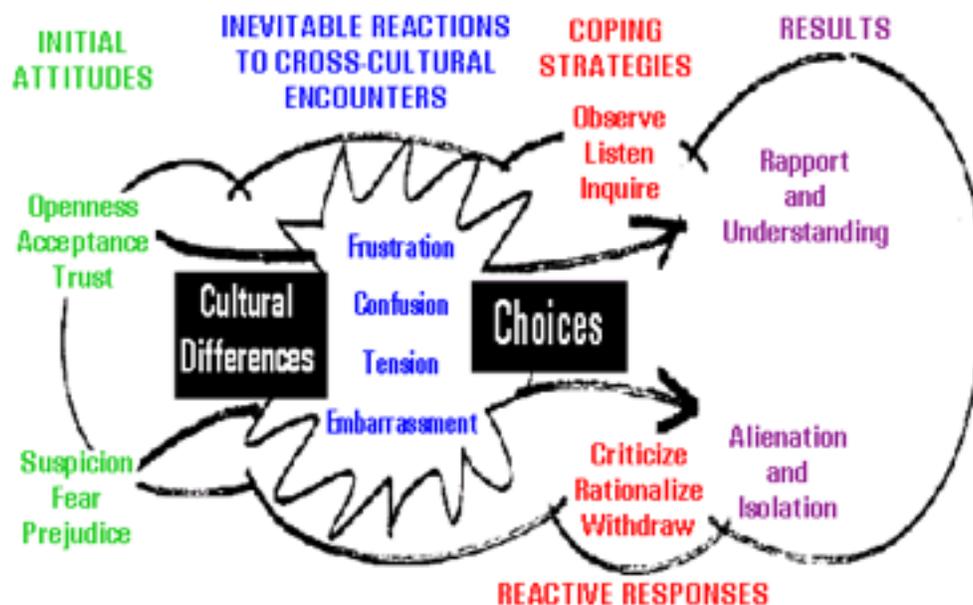
## Effectiveness for a Lifetime

Whether you leave your home culture again or stay to serve the Lord at home, God wants to guard your spirit and help you integrate your cross-cultural experience into your life back home. He wants to use the insights you've gained to move you further-beyond the city limits of your personal Jerusalem. Across the cultural boundaries of your Samaria to an intercultural effectiveness for a lifetime.

## Globalization

Survival skills for missionaries, foreign exchange students and others working to bridge cultural differences

This diagram below illustrates two paths people take during the four phases of long-term cross-cultural encounters. In 1954, the term "culture shock" was coined by Kalvero Oberg to describe the period of cultural adjustment. The confusion and anxiety brought on by culture stress or shock may cause us to think, do or say things that are contrary to God's purpose.



## **Achieving Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry**

- Make effort to learn about the culture beforehand: dress-code, manners, customs, foods, religions, the way they talk, family relations, death ...
- Read books, magazines, news
- If possible, talk to people from that country
- Ask them their perception of Americans
- Learn as much language as possible
- Pray a lot, be flexible and alert, make it fun
- Compare the culture to the Scripture - not to your culture, let God love them through you

## **Symptoms of culture shock:**

- Unwarranted criticism of the culture and people
- Heightened irritability, defensive, over-reacting to minor issues
- Fear of the unknown, spiritual oppression
- Loss of appetite, upset stomach, difficulty sleeping
- Depression, withdrawal, loneliness
- Constant complaints about the climate
- Continual offering of excuses for staying indoors
- Utopian ideas concerning one's previous culture
- Continuous concern about the purity of water and food
- Fear of touching local people
- Refusal to learn the language
- Preoccupation about being robbed or cheated
- Pressing desire to talk with people who "really make sense."
- Preoccupation with returning home, being home-sick, becoming judgmental

# Stages most people go through in adjusting to a new culture

**Fun** The excitement and adventure of experiencing new people, things, and opportunities.

**Flight** The urge to avoid everything and everyone that is different.

**Fight** The temptation to judge people or things that may be different as bad or foolish.

**Fit** Willingness to understand, to embrace, and to creatively interact with the new culture.

## Coping strategy for culture shock: Survival techniques

How can we cope with culture shock? Having some information about culture shock is a first important step. Then, to successfully cope, make sure your attitudes mirror those suggested in green and red in the top half of the diagram. Follow these tips on surviving situations with unfamiliar verbal and non-verbal codes:

### **Focus on what you can control**

People in culture shock often feel out of control. So, don't worry about things you cannot change. Focus on the positives, don't dwell on negatives

### **Don't invest major energy in minor problems**

People make "mountains out of molehills" even more quickly in cross-cultural situations than they do in their own culture

### **Tackle major stressors head on**

Don't avoid things. Recognize you are vulnerable to a spiritual attack (Put on armor – Eph 6; Draw near to God-Js 4:8)

### **Ask for help**

Create a wide support network as quickly as you can in your target culture

### **Write it down**

Record your thoughts and frustrations in a journal. This will give you a healthy outlet for expressing your feelings.

Knowing how to survive culture shock or stress can be useful to missionaries as well as to aiding foreign students who come to our country to study.

## Lead someone to Christ – biggest source of joy

### Help from the Bible

Can Scripture help us with cross-cultural adjustment? Well, the book of Acts would be a good place to start in looking for examples of cultural adjustment. Paul, who grew up in modern-day Turkey and then was educated in Jerusalem, moved around the Mediterranean planting churches in different cultural contexts. To the Philippians he wrote: "I learned to be content whatever the circumstances." (*Phil 4:11*) As Paul coped with various cultural issues, he was also dogged by Jewish Christians from Israel who tried to force Gentile converts to become Jewish (in which case Christianity would have been a mono-cultural movement).

Another Biblical event to look at would be the story of Ruth. Here's a young woman who left her home country and culture and moved to Israel and wound up ultimately being in the list of Jesus' ancestors!

Other Bible stories to ponder include:

- **Joseph:** He wound up being forced as a slave into another country and culture. He kept his faith and lived in such a wise way that he rose to a position of power. (*Gen 37-50*)
- **Daniel:** Living in Babylon during the exile period, he kept his faith while also being a person of influence in the Babylonian government.
- **Abraham:** Abraham had some failures in his cross-cultural encounters. Because of fears for his own safety, he introduced his wife as his sister during a visit to Egypt. (*Gen 12:10-20*)

# How to Act and What to say in different Cultures

## Customs and Behavior - Tips on how to act in a Muslim home or country

WHAT TO DO OR NOT TO DO: Whether you are meeting at a Muslims home or doing business in a Muslim country, there are certain social graces, customs and behavior which, when understood, can help avoid unnecessary complications or hurts.

## General Behavior, Attitudes and Demeanor – The Golden Rule

Jesus said, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”. (Matthew 7:12)

The so called ‘Golden Rule’ of Jesus best sums up how to be prepared for going to any foreign country or to a neighbors house – despite customs and cultural differences. With regards to Muslims, it is interesting to note that in an imitation of the golden rule, a hadith says: “A Muslim should treat others as he would wish them to treat him...Like for others what he would like for himself.”

## Important customs to watch when you visit Muslims anywhere:

- Practice Humility: Have a demeanor which models kindness and forbids being harsh, rude, or even speaking loudly to others.
- Seek Moderation: Many Muslims value deliberation, a careful consideration that focuses on the outcome of a matter. Moderation in speech, and avoidance of being nervous, highly-strung or liable to sudden anger, characterizes many of those who “submit to God.”
- Sincerity is Key: A kind, honest, humble approach–free of an arrogant and overbearing attitude–naturally opens the way for agreeable exchanges

## Greetings and Contact

- Handshakes, though regarded as important, usually do not possess the same firmness as handclasps of many Europeans or Americans. We usually shake hands only the first time we are introduced to someone. Most Arabs shake hands every time they meet you and every time they leave you. This applies whether they meet you on the street, in an office, at a conference, restaurant, or at home. The customs and behavior in Saudi Arabia is to shake hands on meeting, chat a bit, and shake hands again on leaving—even if you meet ten times a day. If sitting, rise when shaking hands as well as when an esteemed person enters a room.
- Touching, long handshakes, grasped elbows, even walking hand in hand by two males is commonplace in the Arab world. A considerable number of Arabs touch more between the same sex, to show liking—not sex. They hold hands, hug each other, kiss if close friends. As Arab customs and behavior condones the outward display of affection between male friends, one may see Arab men, even officials and military officers, holding hands as they walk together or otherwise converse with one another. **If an individual Arab does not touch you, he does not like you—or he may be trying to restrain himself because you are not used to being touched.** A full body embrace, accompanied with hugging, should not be initiated until you are sure that the Arab is a close friend. If the Arab initiates it, participate and consider yourself honored and/or accepted.
- Contact between the opposite sex in public is considered close to obscene.
- Use the right hand to eat, touch and present gifts. The left is generally regarded as unclean.

## Greetings and Conversations

- Small talk and ritual greetings is normal. Middle Easterners often greet each other with a number of ritual phrases and fixed responses. Ancient custom governs these interactions. To Western eyes, profuse greetings, inquiries about health and well being, often take up inordinate amounts of time but it is important in establishing friendly relations. Remember, however, it is insulting to ask about a Muslim's wife or another female family member.
- Eye contact during discussions—often long and direct—is important. Staring is not necessarily rude (except gazing at women).
- **Be aware of appearing to be in a hurry when you are among Arabs.** For example, during a business appointment or social visit with an Arab, do not look at your watch or otherwise act as if you have little time to talk. Arabs can be very offended by this. Time is much less rigidly scheduled in Arab countries than in western countries.
- Pointing your finger or a pen at anyone while speaking, or beckon anyone with your finger. **It is considered a threat, and only animals are treated in this manner.**
- Distance in talking with one another (body space) may be much closer with Middle East peoples than with Westerners.

## Hospitality and Visits / Meals

- Hospitality and giving a warm reception to strangers goes back to the culture of the desert. Developed over centuries, where the desert environment bound traveling nomads to depend on the graciousness and generosity of others, hospitality enabled inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula to survive thirst, hunger and sudden raids/attacks. Many Middle Eastern peoples continue this custom of showing courtesy and consideration to strangers. Demonstrating friendliness, generosity and hospitableness become expressions of personal honor, even sacred duties.
- Take off your shoes at the entrance and leave them there before going in. Sometimes oversize slippers are provided for you to put on.
- Men should not wear shorts, and women should not go there wearing short sleeves or sleeveless dresses.
- Take care when sitting. Avoid stretching legs in front of or sitting up higher than others, sitting with the left hand behind the back, or positioning oneself so the shadows fall upon half of one's body.
- Avoid putting feet on tables or furniture. Show respect. Refrain from leaning against walls, slouching in chairs, and keeping hands in pockets. Keep from pointing with the feet. Do not show the soles of the feet, as they are the lowest and dirtiest part of the body.
- Allowing your host to initiate discussion topics is a good policy. Expect handshakes from all personnel in a party. Sometimes Arabs use double meanings in conversation, which allows for all parties to feel good and not lose face. Such use shows the practitioner to be a person of culture.
- Do not talk loudly.
- Use the right hand to eat. The left is generally regarded as unclean.
- Expect the actual eating of a meal to come at the conclusion to an evening's festivities. Touch food and pass it with your right hand only. In some areas, Middle Easterners consider it impolite to eat everything on one's plate. Leaving food becomes a symbol of abundance and serves to compliment the host.

## **Outward Affection and Gestures**

- Take off your shoes at the entrance and leave them there before going in. Sometimes oversize slippers are provided for you to put on.
- Men should not go into a mosque wearing shorts, and women should not go there wearing short sleeves or sleeveless dresses.
- Do not talk loudly.
- Do not walk directly in front of people praying.
- Do not take pictures of people in a mosque, particularly women.
- Mosques are considered to be shelters for homeless people.
- Do not be surprised to find mosques without furniture, except for the carpet. The "Islamic religion advocates a simple way of life for its followers."